

# Italy

## A Promising Market for U.S. Pet Product Exports

By Annalena Anselmini

U.S. Commercial Service, Milan

**T**he Italian market for pet products is one of the largest in Europe and has significant growth potential. The overall pet products sector no longer represents just a passing fad but has become a booming business. Since 1990, the Italian pet products market has expanded by more than 70 percent, reaching \$2.9 billion in 2002. This increase is more than double the growth of the sector in other major European countries, where the pet market has already reached maturity.

In recent years, the profile of the average Italian pet owner has changed, as has the role pets play in society. Today dogs and cats—as well as birds, small animals, and even exotic animals such as reptiles and fish—are considered friends and companions. In this increasingly hectic and stressful society, pets represent security and provide important emotional support.

As a result of the role played by pets in Italian society, pet ownership in Italy is on the rise, making it the fourth highest in Europe, after the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. In the 2000–2002 period, the Italian

pet products market proved to be the most dynamic in the European Union, registering the highest average annual growth rate of 4.3 percent.

Italy's pet population is estimated to be almost 60 million (against a human population of 58 million). Demographic phenomena of great relevance such as the fall in birthrate—which today in Italy is 1.26 children per woman compared with the European average of 1.47—and the increase of single-member households, above all elderly, increase the importance of pets as emotional substitutes.

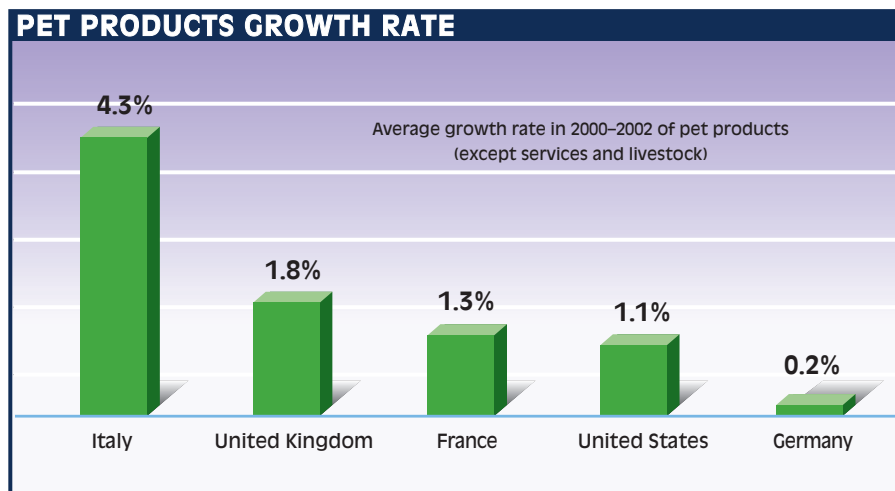
The pet products market in Italy has grown considerably since the end

of the 1990. This market is one of the most promising from a global perspective, both in current conditions and short-term growth potential. The latest figures for 2000–2002 confirm positive market trends and growth rates that could create new opportunities for U.S. exports. This is mainly due to the size of the pet population, consumers' increasing reliance on manufactured pet food, consumers' growing concern for pets, and the rapid development of distribution networks in the pet products market.

### PET CARE

The changing role of pets in Italy is spurring demand for pet-related products and services. To meet the needs of pet owners and the needs of the pets themselves, pet products have become more specialized. Italians demand a wide variety of products for their pets, from special diets to dog apparel, and from grooming tools to perfumes. Since pets now are more integral to people's lives, people tend to spend significant amounts of money on pet care.

Dog food is one of the subsectors expected to grow the most, because the consumption rate of commercial food is still very low compared with other countries. While the "Mediterranean diet" (pasta or rice) is still prevalent in dog and cat diets, the market for industrial or commercial pet food has increased greatly in recent years. This trend is a result of some key factors: people have less time to care for their pets, pet food can be easily found in supermarkets



Source: Centro Studi Zoomark

where people usually shop, and commercial pet food is becoming more diversified and acceptable. Therefore, the future of the pet food segment lies in further specialization ensuing from increased research and from the “humanization” of the products, which in turn leads pet owners to buy them.

Pet care is also experiencing remarkable growth. The “humanization” of pets has led owners to buy specific products for their animal companions. In the pet accessories sector, the growth is even greater, due to the development of high technology products, as well as those that focus on the beauty, elegance, and “personality” of pets and satisfy pet owners’ whims.

Technological innovation is mainly found in aquarium and terrarium markets, which will continue to experience remarkable growth. Also, many aquarium equipment manufacturers are beginning to produce terrarium accessories, as a result of the increase in reptiles being kept as pets.

Although the retail end of the distribution chain continues to be dominated by small, specialized pet stores, distribution patterns have changed significantly in recent years. Traditionally, pet products were sold only through specialized stores.

In recent years, pet products and accessories have been increasingly sold also by large department stores, hypermarkets, and other mass-marketers. ■

## Zoomark International

### An Ideal Gateway to Europe for U.S. Companies in the Pet Sector

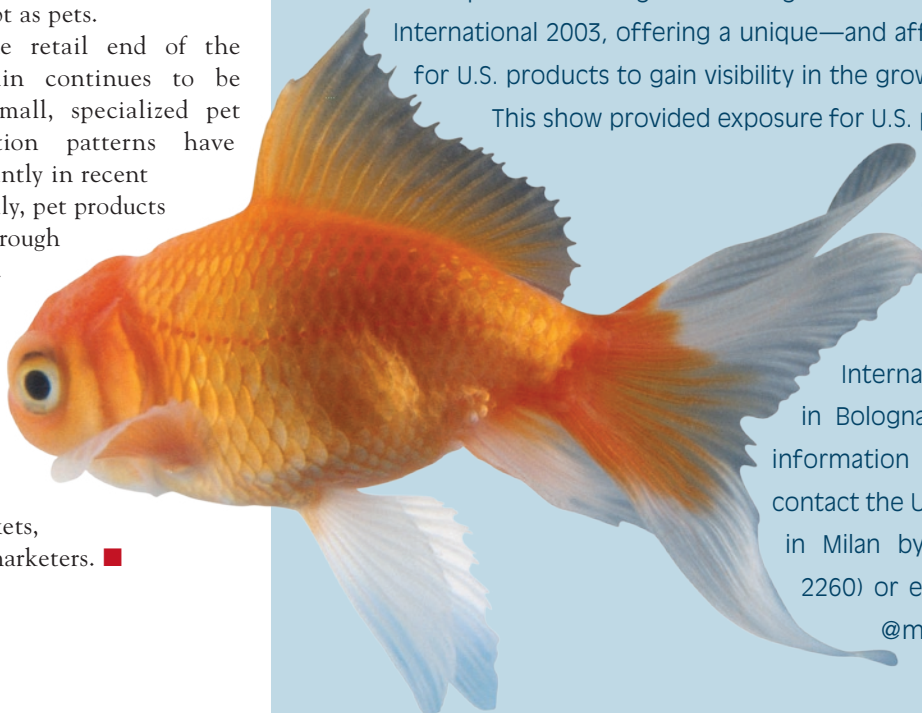
American pet products enjoy a reputation for innovation and high quality. Excellent opportunities exist for innovative pet products, but U.S. companies must exhibit to take advantage. Exhibiting at a trade show is the fastest way to enter the expanding Italian market for pet products.

In fact, in Italy trade fairs play a major role in product marketing. U.S. companies seeking to penetrate the Italian market are encouraged to exhibit in, or at least to visit, a sector-specific Italian fair. For U.S. manufacturers and exporters of pet products wishing to sell in Italy (and in the rest of Europe) the place to be is Zoomark International, a biennial event and one of the leading pet products exhibitions in Europe. The most recent exhibition was held in Bologna, Italy, April 11–14, 2003. More than 500 exhibitors and 20,000 qualified buyers came to Zoomark International, making it Italy’s premier and Europe’s largest pet products trade show in 2003.

Given the importance of this exhibition, the Commercial Service of the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture organized a U.S. pavilion at Zoomark International 2003, offering a unique—and affordable—opportunity for U.S. products to gain visibility in the growing European market.

This show provided exposure for U.S. products to thousands of potential buyers, distributors, and other interested parties throughout Europe.

The next Zoomark International will take place in Bologna, May 5–8, 2005. For information about participating, contact the U.S. Commercial Service in Milan by phone (+39-02-659-2260) or e-mail ([milan.office.box@mail.doc.gov](mailto:milan.office.box@mail.doc.gov)).



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